

“THE ABC’S BEST DAYS ARE AHEAD”

– Mark Scott

Mal Hewitt reports:

The ABC’s Managing Director, Mark Scott, believes that the ABC’s best days are still to come, which is not to devalue the 75 wonderful years which have already passed, but reflects a great optimism about the future of the National broadcaster. In a meeting with NSW FABC President Mal Hewitt and Membership Secretary Chris Cartledge on Wednesday 3rd April, the ABC’s Managing Director and Director, Communications, Gary Dawson, outlined a vision for the future in which the ABC leads all other media organizations in embracing new technology and maintaining outstanding quality and innovation in traditional radio and television broadcasting. Whilst there is a strong commitment to keeping the best that the ABC does, there is also a belief that the ABC must change in order to remain strong.

Referring to the recent announcement of the new Division of ABC Resources, Mark Scott reiterated that “the ABC is committed in the future to being a broadcaster and producer of its own material as it is today. That means sourcing the best quality material at the best price from both our own producers and the independent production sector.” Relatively inexpensive programs (Spics and Specs, New Inventors, Talking Heads) will remain 100% ABC productions, but co-productions in



which the cost is shared (Enough Rope, The Chaser, Summer Heights High, Bastard Boys) allow for the production of more material at lower cost, whilst maintaining high production quality and greater leverage from the ABC. Scott restated his strong support for internal productions by the ABC, with its high level of efficiency and effectiveness.

Recent press reports highlighted the planned introduction of automated studio systems in television news studios, requiring significantly less staff. “The savings generated through these measures will allow the ABC to produce more content, including more news content, for our audiences, and we plan to set aside some of the savings to fund additional TV production from outside Sydney and Melbourne.” In discussing the

evolution from traditional broadcaster of radio and TV to the delivery of information and entertainment through the internet, Mark Scott pointed out that there were 20 million downloads of Radio National products last year, 50% of these from outside Australia, and spoke of the new ABC website abc.net.au/greenatwork where the ABC will be on show as a role model for the reduction of its own carbon footprint.

On the matter of advertising on the ABC, the Managing Director repeated his undertaking that there would be no advertising (other than internal advertising of ABC programs) on radio, TV or abc.net.au but indicated that there is a grey area with ABC – linked websites such as Countdown. Friends of the ABC will be seeking assurances from Minister Conroy that, if necessary, existing legislation will be strengthened to ensure that the ABC remains totally advertisement-free in all of its activities. Clarification was sought from Mark Scott on the recently announced ABC Shop download facility, where material currently available for purchase

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A word from the NSW President



I am grateful to the members of Cowper Branch of Friends of the ABC for recently producing a paper which has been circulated to all NSW FABC branches, in which they question how effective Friends of the ABC has been as a political lobby group in recent years, and raise some very important questions about our role in the new

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Who to write...

Anyone seeking basic information about writing to persons of influence might find it helpful to go to the FABC NSW website www.fabc.org.au where there are some menu items under "Be Active" leading to pages of information: *Who can I write to? What can I say?*

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political environment of a Rudd Labor government. I will attempt to address some of the issues raised by the Cowper paper

HOW EFFECTIVE HAS FRIENDS OF THE ABC BEEN AS A LOBBY GROUP

Could I remind you all of the nature and style of the government (and Prime Minister) that we have been dealing with in Canberra for the last 11 years, a Prime Minister who greatly admired Margaret Thatcher, of 'the lady's not for turning' fame, and a government which:

- ignored half a million people on the streets of Sydney, comparable numbers in other capital cities, and 70% of the entire population telling the government not to get involved in the Iraq war
- ignored virtually the entire legal profession in its opposition to draconian anti-terror laws, which challenged the very foundations of civil liberties in this country
- ignored the combined welfare arms of every mainstream church (and all the Catholic bishops) in their opposition to changes to Centrelink procedures, in fact told those very welfare agencies to "stay out of politics"
- ignored all of the scientific evidence relating to climate change, in fact made it clear that the CSIRO could forget government funding if it made too much of the climate change issue

So who has been able to lobby the past government successfully? Perhaps the coal industry, the mining industry, the timber industry, all major enterprises which saw action on climate change as a threat to their profitability, all of which spend millions of dollars maintaining permanent lobbyists in Canberra. Certainly NOT the Australian film industry, major arts organizations, the universities, all of whom have been effective lobbyists in the past, all with a lot more resources than FABC to fund their campaigns.

The truth is that nobody knows how effective FABC campaigns have been with this government or its predecessors. It could be argued that

the fact that Australia still has a publicly funded national broadcaster is a sign of the success of past FABC campaigns, given the number of members of the Howard government who were prepared to go on record stating their belief that the ABC should be privatized. Undoubtedly, 100,000 supporters in Sydney domain, or 15,000 supporters on the Opera House forecourt, or even 250,000 ABC listeners who joined in ABC birthday celebrations last year are not insignificant expressions of public support. How do you evaluate the success of public campaigns? We certainly were not taken the way of New Zealand or Canada, towards partial or complete privatization, by a hostile Howard government, but it must be remembered that the government included strong ABC supporters (especially from the National party) as well as detractors.

The truth is that we still have Radio National's insightful and thought-provoking programs, we still have "The Chaser" boys able to expose the utter stupidity of the whole APEC circus (would they have had any chance of getting it on commercial TV???), we still have exposes on Lateline and Four Corners (even though many programs are bought rather than ABC-produced), we still have the wonderful world of ABC for Kids— I could go on with the jewels that are still there for us to select from. We would like the ABC to be able to do more of it, and have more money to do it with. That is where we need discussion within and between FABC branches and members as to how best to do that in a new political context, but I believe that the ABC has maintained quality and independence through tough times (and we must remember that the Hawke/Keating governments could hardly be considered generous to the ABC either!)

FRIENDS OF THE ABC'S CAFÉ SOCIETY IMAGE

We are an organization primarily made up of well-educated, middle class, over-50 Australians, with most of those involved in positions of responsibility retired from full time employment. In this respect we are not dissimilar from most other community organizations

across the country. It is also unrealistic to think that FABC is going to attract young members to most of its meetings and activities. This does not mean that the younger ABC audience should not have a voice in Friends of the ABC. We simply have to ensure that our communication methods and opportunities for dialogue with this audience must take into account the preferred communication vehicle for younger people – the internet. There must be dialogue with young people, and this is an area where branches can and should share ideas and resources. It will certainly be an agenda item for this year's FABC state conference.

CO-ORDINATED NATIONAL ACTIVITY

There are historical reasons why Friends of the ABC is a state-based organization, however every two years there is a National Conference, with reporting back to the branches from that conference. The 2007 conference did produce national approaches and recommended strategies for branches to adopt in the leadup to the election. Again, it is impossible to establish the effectiveness of these strategies in influencing the election outcome, but I am certain that the enormous effort which ACT Branch put into the seat of Eden-Monaro had some influence on the result in that seat, and FABC material reminding voters of the importance of their vote in the Senate reached a very wide audience. Also, the 2007 National Conference elected a National Spokesperson in Professor Alan Knight from Queensland, who has been able to gain significant media coverage for the voice of Friends of the ABC on a number of ABC related issues over the past ten months.

GETUP CAMPAIGNS

Past NSW President Gary Cook was responsible for the GETUP campaign in 2006, which collected nearly 80,000 signatures in support of the ABC, and was the most successful GETUP campaign to that point. Recent discussions with GETUP suggest that there needs to be a significant issue, perhaps relating the importance of public broadcasting to the right of the Australian people to be served by media free of both commercial and government influence. This may well be a task for a working group at state conference.

RELATIONS WITH NEW GOVERNMENT

The new Minister for Communications, Senator Conroy, has already met a delegation involving FABC presidents from Queensland, NSW and ACT. It was apparent from that meeting that, along with Friends of the ABC, the minister has to fight for any increase in ABC funding against the demands of every other minister in the context of a finite amount of money in the budget. However, what was established in that meeting was the importance of maintaining dialogue with the minister in what will be a long process of pressure and lobbying in order that the ABC is able to fulfil its charter in every way. Input from Friends of the ABC will be sought to the whole budget planning process for the 2009 budget, a critical year for the ABC as the commencement of the next triennium, with the ultimate aim of convincing the Finance Minister and Treasurer – another working group task for state conference.

Two things were very clear from that meeting, though – that we cannot expect largesse for the ABC in the 2008 budget, as Kevin Rudd made no pre-election promises relating to the ABC, and that Minister Conroy has a passionate commitment to ensuring that the ABC receives increased funding in the future to better enable it to be the medium through which “the Australian story can be told to the Australian audience.”

NSW Friends of the ABC has the dual role of informing and educating the public and lobbying politicians on behalf of the ABC, whilst maintaining open communication with ABC staff and management and constructive dialogue with the minister of the day. The branches throughout NSW are an essential element in effectively meeting these responsibilities, particularly those of informing, educating and lobbying, and the work of many of our branches in these areas is quite outstanding. However, I accept the challenge put out by Cowper Branch that we can do better. The 2008 NSW FABC State Conference in Wollongong in August will provide a forum in which branches and membership will shape the future of Friends of the ABC, a future which may well be very different from the past. I look forward to your participation in this process. 

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through ABC shops will be able to be downloaded for a fraction of the cost of the purchase price. Programs which are currently available at no cost on the ABC website, including podcasts, vodcasts, news and current affairs, will remain accessible free of charge.

Whilst it was clear from our discussion with Mark Scott and Gary Dawson that much energy within the ABC is focused upon making the available dollars go further, largely through embracing new technologies, it was also clear that the ABC will be seeking a significant increase in funding from the Rudd Government for the next triennial funding period, commencing with the 2009 Federal Budget. Included in this request will be funding for ABC 3, the digital children's channel which, Mark Scott assured us, is ready to commence broadcasting as soon as the funds are available.

Friends of the ABC will actively support ABC management as it seeks a significant increase in funding to enable the ABC to raise the Australian content of its programming, both “in house” and through co-productions, and ensures that the ABC remains at the cutting edge of digital broadcasting technology. The role of FABC branches will be vital, both in applying pressure to local Federal Members of Parliament, and in keeping the public aware of the importance of adequate funding for our national broadcaster. This will be top of the agenda for NSW Friends of the ABC throughout 2008 and at the State Conference in Wollongong in August, and Mark Scott accepted our invitation to attend the conference as our keynote speaker. 

Illawarra Activity

The Christmas season is always a busy time for the Friends of the ABC Illawarra. It starts with the Kiama Seaside Markets, where each year volunteers staff a stall taking membership enquiries and renewals as well as selling the full range of Friends merchandise.

The Christmas Party takes the form of an afternoon tea with a special guest speaker. This year just on a hundred members attended to hear popular local ABC radio host Steve Parsons talk about his experiences in the media.

Steve recently celebrated 40 years in broadcasting. Much of that time spent

in the Illawarra where he hosted the number one breakfast program for 25 years. He was also the breakfast personality at 2GB in Sydney for 3 years when the News/Talk format was launched in the 1970's.

Steve's television career includes time at TCN 9 during the early days of colour and ten years as a sports and news presenter on Prime TV. He has written a weekly newspaper column

and more recently spent 5 years in radio management before joining ABC Illawarra.

Steve is a trivia wiz and writes the questions for ABC Illawarra's 'baby boomer quiz' heard each weekday morning on 97.3FM. His ten question quiz for the Illawarra's Christmas party which was based on ABC Illawarra was a lot of fun and a great hit with members. ☺☺



Steve Parsons and part of the audience at the Illawarra Christmas Party.

Mid north coast branch Retreat

Mid north coast branch FABC is holding a Forum to be held at Falls Forest Retreat, Johns River on 17th May.

The Retreat is set in beautiful Gondwana Rainforest Sanctuary with walks to waterfalls. Johns River is 40 minutes south of Port Macquarie, 3.5 – 4 hours north of Sydney.

The agenda is a report from each branch, brainstorm on issues of concern, come up with a plan for 2008 and actions for branches to follow up.

Keynote speaker, **Professor Alan Knight**, is FABC National Spokesperson.

There will be space to stay overnight if you choose, but be in quick – \$50 per head.

Catering – Lunch, afternoon tea, dinner \$50 (or by arrangement). Self-cater breakfast on 18th May.

Enquiries please ring 02 6583 8798 or 0431 598125

Northern Rivers Activity



From left to right are Ed Bennett (Treasurer), Neville Jennings (President), Doug Myler (Vice President), Sue Sawkins and Steve Sawkins (Committee Members). The photo was taken at Trinity College Lismore.

At the end of 2007 prior to the Federal election, the Northern Rivers branch held two "Meet the Candidates" rallies. All candidates expressed support for the ABC but there were variations in policy over the method of making appointments to the ABC Board. Some 5000 postcards provided by the Illawarra Branch and supporting the ABC were distributed by letter box drop or handed out at polling booths on the day of the election.

In the Northern Rivers region, Janelle Saffin won the seat of Page for the ALP and Justine Elliott held her seat of Richmond for the ALP.

On 26 January in Lismore, members of the Northern Rivers branch accepted a nomination for an Australia Day award following the successful exhibition "Through Australian Eyes" held at the Lismore City Library in 2007 and visits to the region by ABC foreign correspondents. Neville Jennings accepted the nomination on behalf of the branch in the Arts / Cultural category.

Northern Rivers branch members have expressed concern about the proposed change top the ABC logo. They look forward to seeing Quentin Dempster resume his rightful place on the ABC board and would support any move to have commercial advertising banned from SBS in line with the ABC's non-commercial stance.

The next branch meeting will be held at the Lismore Workers Club on Wednesday 5 March at 6 pm.

Neville Jennings ☺☺

Central Coast Activity

The Central Coast Branch was particularly fortunate to have Jeff McMullen as our guest speaker on Friday evening 29 February, when 120 members and friends attended to hear and question a dedicated journalist, a powerful advocate for Australia's indigenous people and an informed analyst of the seriousness of global warming.

Jeff began as the youngest foreign correspondent with the ABC and began reporting from PNG. From that beginning he has had a wide range of experiences in many regions of the world where tragedy and suffering have occurred and still demonstrate man's inhumanity in many areas of conflict. Not only are people at war with one another but at war with the earth and Jeff contends that water will be the greatest challenge to mankind along with species destruction.

DNA tells us that we are all members of the human family and despite Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, Idi Amin and others, the human race can rise above these brutalities and offer hope for the future.

Life style illnesses are becoming evident on a global pattern and threaten to reduce life expectancy but this has always been the situation amongst the aboriginal communities who suffer from heart problems, diabetes and renal failure, all of which are preventable. Indigenous mothers often have more than one of these illnesses which impact on their children, creating markedly reduced life expectancy. Jeff's answer to these problems is education. Research suggests that one extra year of education can add 4 years to life expectancy. Amongst the indigenous people of North America, the life expectancy has been raised to within 3 to 5 years of the white population compared with 12 to 16 years in earlier days. Many Australian indigenous children do not see a book until they go to school.

Jeff expressed strong objection to any move to urbanise indigenous people. They must be supported in

their small communities with all the necessary facilities to make their lives healthy and meaningful, and to give their children the opportunities for higher education.

Only 7% of white Australians know an aboriginal family and Jeff's injunction to us is to join in with aboriginal programmes, to invite families into our homes and to make financial contributions to help with the education of aboriginal people. A "Literacy Back Pack" at a cost of \$100 per year can make a significant difference to the learning



Members Klaas Woldring & Pat McDonnell with Jeff McMullen

opportunities for an aboriginal child.

Jeff's talk was most inspiring, presented completely without notes, and demonstrated the total conviction that he and his family have to the cause of equalising the opportunities for indigenous people in the Australian society. 

Vale Nancy Short



On 19th February, after a long illness, much loved friend Nancy Short passed from this world. She was a founding member of FABC in 1976, and was the main instigator of the founding of the mid north coast branch when she moved to Port Macquarie in the 1980s.

Tributes were many – "small in stature but big in everything else, especially her spirit" was one from former President of mnc branch John Neilson. Former President of FABC NSW, Walter Bass, said "an extraordinary worker, attended every meeting of FABC in Sydney before moving north and supporter of 150,000 different causes". This is my treasured memory of Nancy too. I first met her on a Peace demonstration in Port and shared with her (though she put in more time and passion than me) the following interests – Reconciliation (she walked across the Sydney Harbour Bridge with the multitudes in 2000); Rural Australians for Refugees; Dune Care; environmental conservation; Greens (attending the founding meetings of the Three Rivers

Greens branch which serves the Macleay, Hastings and Manning catchments); music (she was an accomplished pianist) and culture of all kinds. Everyone always knew about these passions – she always wore the t-shirts and badges!

I'm sure there are some interests I've forgotten – but the one we're most interested in here is the Friends. I'm sure her name is well known amongst those of a certain age at Ultimo. She brought Phillip Adams to Port in 1998 and 200 attended a dinner at the RSL. She rang local non-attending members every 2 months or so to urge them to come to meetings. She rang me at least 10 times before I made time to attend a BBQ. Within a year I was Treasurer of the branch, and later President. But she was the one with the ideas and I went along, reigning her in occasionally. She was also a dear friend and since her illness I've missed her heaps. It was such a shock when she was no longer able to attend our meetings and functions.

Vale Nancy. Good on you for a life ethically and well-lived. And how like you to hang on to see the Labour Party victory in November and the apology on Sorry Day, less than a week before you succumbed, aged 94.

Drusi Megget
Port Macquarie 21.3.08 

Have the Friends of the ABC lost their teeth?

Darce Cassidy

Shortly after the election of the Howard government, the ABC, and its friends, faced a great challenge.

Despite an election promise to maintain ABC funding, the government cut ABC funding by 12%. By the start of the 21st century a new Managing Director, Jonathan Shier, was wreaking havoc internally. The ABC was suffering from a double whammy, a hostile Managing Director and a crippling lack of funds.

They were dark days. As the then national spokesperson for Friends of the ABC I summarised our immediate aims the Spring 2001 edition of our quarterly newsletter, Background Briefing. They were:

- Restoration of ABC funding to its 1995-6 level, plus funding for the ABC to fully participate in the digital environment.
- Advertising to be prohibited on ABC Online.
- An end to the stacking of the ABC board.
- Replacing Jonathan Shier

It didn't look likely at the time, but we have won on most of these issues.

Today the Shier regime is no more than a bad dream. He left under a black cloud.

Today government funding of the ABC is well above its 1995-6 levels. Adjusted for inflation government funding has risen from \$747.1 million in 1995-6 to \$802.5 million in 2006-7. (Source: Commonwealth Parliamentary Library).

While we rarely saw eye to eye with Richard Alston when he was Minister for Communications, a delegation of FABC representatives from South Australia, Victoria and the Australian Capital territory had a positive response from the Coalition's Backbench Communications Committee. National Party members, and Liberals from regional areas, knew how important the ABC was in their communities.

While all FABC organisations were part of this long drawn out funding campaign, Garry Cook, the former President of FABC NSW deserves special mention. Gary played a key role in getting the Get Up organisation to

partner with us in a petition to the government. Seventy thousand signatures sent a powerful message to Canberra.

Did these changes come about because the coalition government wanted to be rid of Jonathan Shier, or because that government wanted to give the ABC more money? Clearly not. They happened because of public pressure, and the Friends of the ABC played a crucial role in the creation of that public pressure.

Today Friends of the ABC policy on the method of appointment to the ABC board is official government policy. Our early efforts to persuade Labor to adopt a system based on the Nolan Rules in the U.K. failed. Labor initially gave us a blunt no, but we persevered, and after years of persistence managed to persuade the Labor Party's new Shadow Minister for Communications to adopt our policy.

The Rudd government has also adopted our policy that there should be a staff elected director on the ABC board.

These are real and substantial gains, but we have had only partial success with ABC Online. The Act has not been amended to prohibit advertising on ABC web sites. Moreover, while the main ABC web sites are advertisement free, subsidiary sites, like the Countdown site, are running advertisements.

Funding is still a major issue. The ABC is better funded that it was in 1995-6, the last year that Labor was in power, but by any reasonable measure the ABC is still under resourced. The ABC struggles to survive financially. This year another round of redundancies is likely.

Advertising and other commercial influences have the potential to distort the ABC's priorities. The growth of advertising on the SBS, with advertisements now interrupting programs, is an ominous precedent.

How then are we equipped to meet these challenges? While we are separate organisations in the different states and territories, we co-operate together. We also co-operate with Save Our SBS.

Every state and territory organisation now has its own web site. Moreover

our National Resource Centre website contains more than 170 separate documents. They range from letters to the editor and media releases through to detailed submissions to parliamentary inquiries. Included are 18 complete editions of our national journal, Background Briefing.

The NSW and Victorian organisations, which are of course our largest, each produce their own regular newsletters. From Adelaide Joan Laing edits Background Briefing, a regular newsletter shared by FABC groups in Western Australia, South Australia, the ACT and Queensland.

We lost no time in meeting with the new Minister, Stephen Conroy. A delegation comprising Jill Greenwell (ACT), Mal Hewett (NSW) and Alan Knight (QLD) had a positive meeting early in the year. While it was a positive meeting in most respects, there was no good news on budget issues. The government is concerned about the sub-prime crisis. Our focus therefore will be on the next funding triennium, which begins in 2009.

FABC (ACT and Region) has maintained the contacts our Parliamentary Lobby Group has established with Federal politicians interested in communications policy. In the last year they have been in contact with members of the Senate Committee on Communications issues - Stephen Conroy, Dana Wortley (ALP), Bob Brown, Rachel Siewert, (Greens), Lyn Allison (Democrats) - before the Senate Estimates hearings last October and in May this year. Issues they have lobbied them on include aspects of the ABC's 2006 budget, fears about advertising, the end of ABC talking book production, the new ABC editorial guidelines.

What are the major issues for the next few years? At this stage I think the major issue is ABC3, the proposed kids channel. This is closely linked to funding.

This should be a popular issue with the public. It is literally a motherhood issue. The Howard government promised to fund it, but Labor has been silent so far. I believe we are well placed to make this a major public issue over the next twelve months as we move towards the start of the next funding triennium. 

Scott delivers Aunty's Medicine



Margaret Simons writes:

Hard to imagine the sober personage of ABC Managing Director Mark Scott singing karaoke, but if he did the tune would surely be A Spoonful of Sugar. It's a handy ditty as the politically adept ABC chief tries to do more and more with no more resources - while limbering up to ask for a bigger share of the public purse.

Two weeks ago Scott announced an array of new ABC services. It was mostly a case of slicing and dicing existing content in new ways, but the announcement was nevertheless convincing evidence of Auntie moving with the technological times.

Yesterday came the medicine. New technology saves money. The broadcasting industry is going through what newspapers did twenty years ago, when technology eliminated hundreds of printers' jobs. In London agency reporters tell their stories direct to robot cameras, operating their own auto queues with their feet. The same has been happening for years here in Australia at Sky News.

Auntie is moving with the times here too, and as a result there will be an unspecified number of redundancies at the ABC in production staff due to the automation of television studios. This pill was wrapped up in a bigger pill with the announcement of a new way of counting that will reveal - probably for the first time - the true cost of making television in house at the ABC. This will enable comparisons with contracting out. Meanwhile ABC staff will be encouraged to market any spare capacity to outsiders.

While Scott says the ABC remains committed to a mixed model with some in house production, the long term implications are both profound, tough on ABC staff, and probably inevitable.

Adding to the predictable angst, Scott is being very short on specifics. We don't know how many redundancies there will be, when they

will occur, how much money will be saved or how that money will be spent. As with all things to do with contracting out and efficiency, the devils and angels are likely to lurk in the yet to be announced detail.

Scott talked to Crikey yesterday evening and revealed a bit more of his thinking. Would the savings be spent on more reporters on the beat? He said he "aspired" to do this. Hmmm.

How many redundancies? He wouldn't say, but he pointed out that "traditional old" production studios needed eight or nine people to operate, whereas the new ones being used in Sydney and Melbourne need only two or three. The precise numbers of redundancies will depend on how many people are able and willing to be retrained and redeployed, he said, and this will be worked out in consultations about to begin.

As for the perennial outsourcing issue, Scott said that by outsourcing production, the ABC was able to do more with less. External production meant that other money, such as film commission funds, made Auntie's dollar go further. He claimed that over the last two years every \$1 million of ABC money spent on Australian content has resulted in \$3.4 million of material going to air.

This alone means that outsourcing will continue and grow. At the same time, it seems that the popular cheap and cheerful studio based programs like New Inventors, Spicks and Specks and Talking Heads will continue to be done in-house.

This is probably for two reasons. They wouldn't attract extra outside funding in any case, and the ABC is competitive in making them - as demonstrated by the fact that ABC staff are presently making Good News Week under contract for Channel Ten.

All this takes place in the larger context of the ABC's triennial funding submission, presently in preparation and due to be delivered to Government late this year. Scott freely admits he is preparing the ground - demonstrating that the ABC is using its present allocation to the max.

"If we want to ask for more money in the future, and we do, then we have to have a robust answer to the question of how we use the money we already get," he said.

What will he be asking for? "Too soon, too soon," he responds, but gives some headlines. More high quality Australian content in drama and documentary, more money for multi-channelling, and more opportunities to use the ABC's internet presence to deliver content - fitting hand in glove with the Rudd Government's emphasis on fast Broadband infrastructure.

Expect more over the next few months as Scott uses every forum, including Kevin Rudd's 2020 summit, to begin singing a new tune.

To quote Abba "All the things I could do, if I had a little money. Money, money, money."

<http://www.crikey.com.au/> 

Friends of the ABC (NSW) Bi-Annual State Conference

The next State Conference will be held in Wollongong on 9-10 August 2008.

The Illawarra Branch of the Friends of the ABC is celebrating their 10th year and has offered to host the next State Conference. The inaugural State Conference (2002) was held in Wollongong and was a great success. It was at this conference that the Constitution was changed to formalise the current branch structure.

Branches will be asked to nominate delegates and submit agenda items in the near future. In the meantime put the dates in your diary and if you have any ideas for the agenda please send them to our President Mal Hewitt (contact details on page 2).

FROM CULTURE WAR TO CULTURAL DEMOCRACY: IT'S YOUR ABC

by **Tony Moore**
(Centre for Policy Development)



Many supporters of the ABC felt relieved when a hostile conservative government was replaced by a social democratic one which claims to be friendly.

Since the election, some have called for Howard Government appointees to resign from the board and for the ABC to be properly funded. The change of government, however, is no guarantee that money will pour into Aunty's coffers and a left-wing ABC Board will arise from the ashes of the culture wars.

Perhaps we need to be more creative in what we wish for. Obsessing about individuals and their bias is not the best way to stop the board from being a political plaything, and it is not the solution to the ABC's governance problems. A progressive response should reject

score settling, and instead ask how to enhance public participation in the ABC.

The ABC is grappling with how to transform itself from a paternalistic public broadcaster catering to a loyal if passive audience to a multi-channel narrow-caster, engaging diverse and conditional audiences that have an expectation that they will participate, or at least be consulted, in content creation. While many innovators within the ABC are rising to this challenge, the wider public debate has been a sterile contest between those neo-liberals who loath a state broadcaster which they imagine to be a nest of radicals, and those social democrats and old-style conservatives who uncritically love an 'Aunty' that is no more. Unfortunately, long opposition to the Howard Government's savage funding cuts, bullying of staff and stacking of the Board have led to a negative siege mentality that stops people who value the ABC from doing some hard

thinking about how public broadcasting needs to change to remain relevant to emerging audiences with different, and in many ways more exacting, expectations of media.

I suggest that the ABC needs radical change, and I offer up a plan for creating a non-partisan and fairer system for selecting the board.

Cultural warriors such as Keith Windschuttle or Janet Albrechtsen are no more likely to resign with the change of government than Labor appointees were when the Coalition was elected. Attention should instead be directed to Labor's election pledge to surrender the government's right to make appointments and adopt the 'arm's length' Nolan Rules, <http://friendsoftheabc.org/labors-abc-policies-advance-and-retreat> recently confirmed by Senator Conroy, used for choosing members of public boards in Britain.

Under the Nolan Rules, vacancies are advertised and a selection panel independent of the Minister draws up a short-list based on merit from which the Government must choose. This will mean a vast improvement to the quality of all public boards to which it is extended, as mates, dates, assorted party hacks and ideological axe grinders make way for the qualified or those with deep community connections. In the interests of transparency we can only hope this meritocratic innovation is adopted by state governments, beginning with board appointments in patronage-crippled NSW. With regard to the ABC, Rudd Labor also promised to restore the staff-elected director to the board. A board member who knows something about broadcasting will be a welcome addition and this concession to workplace democracy can only improve governance and esprit de corps.

But as part of the ALP's promise to 'further increase the transparency and democratic accountability of the ABC', why not extend the principle of election further, and allow the election of one or two non-party community representatives, and a representative from the cottage industry of independent producers who provide so much of the ABC's content? Many Labor insiders,



accustomed to the predictability of party pre-selections, are opposed to election of boards, arguing that democratic control is already exerted by parliament, or that people will vote for celebrity lightweights. Due to a century of grounding in producer value and worker's rights, the ALP culture is comfortable with workplace democracy, but still suspicious of calls for consumer democracy. However I'm convinced strong candidates will get up and that the debates surrounding election to the Board will increase the relevance of the ABC to a changing community and enhance the public's sense of ownership. Election will ensure some ideas entrepreneurs and mavericks who may be knocked back by the Nolan process get to make their case.

Crucially, the Rudd Government is entitled by precedent to dissolve the current Board and inaugurate a new one in a clean sweep as part of its promised reform of the selection process. The passing of legislation mandating the Nolan Rules for the appointment of directors, in combination with election of one or more positions, will be on a par with the reforms introduced by Hawke in 1983 in response to the Dix Report, at which time the old Commission was dissolved and the new Corporation's Board took over. This is preferable to the dysfunction of a Board divided between political appointments and those selected by fairer means. In this way the terms of the last of the old style political appointments can end early with minimal acrimony.

But reforming the Board by itself is insufficient. Few realise that the ABC Advisory Council, the official mechanism by which the community communicates directly with the ABC hierarchy, is appointed by the Board. I was a member of the then 'National' Advisory Council in the mid 1980s, appointed on the basis of an interview with Board Directors Veronica Brady and Neville Bonner at a time when the ABC encouraged public activism by the NAC via community forums and research. But we have not heard much from the Advisory Council during the past decade of turmoil. The AC is unlikely to be a conduit for independent or dissenting advice unless it is elected

or chosen under the Nolan Rules. It is also a cause of concern that the once vocal state-based Advisory Councils were abolished in 1989 ahead of the centralisation of production and commissioning in Sydney, that began with the demise of the state-based 7.30 Reports. These valuable state community forums should be re-established as part of the Rudd Government's overhaul of the Board.

Representative structures only go so far towards democratising the ABC. In 2002 the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) investigation found the ABC wanting in the area of qualitative audience research. The Auditor felt that reliance on the commercial ratings system was inappropriate for measuring how successfully the ABC was meeting its charter requirements. Unfortunately, the ABC persists in over-reliance on OzTam or Nielsen ratings and still favours executive hunches over audience consultation, as the recent debacle <http://www.crikey.com.au/Media-Arts-and-Sports/20080214-New-Logo-taking-aim-at-the-ABCs-rebranding.html> about its watermark logo demonstrated.

But audiences have nevertheless impressed themselves on their ABC via ABC Online.

The new Innovation division and forward-looking producers have taken advantage of the interactivity of the new medium, and viewers and listeners are now contributing ideas and comments through the ABC's forums and blogs. Just as listeners have done with radio talkback, audiences are becoming part of online content, contributing passionate and informed discussion alongside program makers and their 'talent'. New media has also liberated the ABC from the tyranny of the ratings, allowing audience numbers and use patterns to be measured via pod and vod cast downloads (17 million in 2007, with even more 'hits'). Lo and behold, as well as the favourite The Chaser, Radio National programs are actually popular, not just in Australia but internationally. With the move into digital multi-channels I predict ABC Online will enable audiences to shape content still further, commenting on pilot programs and

even offering up their own programs for comment, You Tube style, as children already do on the just-launched Rollercoaster www.abc.net.au/rollercoaster/kidstv/rollercoaster.htm site.

Where the ANAO lamented a tendency for Shier-era bureaucrats to manage up the pyramid, to the Managing Director, the ABC's digital initiatives are orientating program makers in the other direction, towards their diverse audiences. This is a democratic and creative trend collapsing the barriers between consumers and producers, and it should be a priority for resourcing by the Rudd government which has pledged to ensure that the ABC is 'able to exploit the potential of new technology'. Senator Conroy said in February that the ABC and SBS would be exempt from the one-off 2% efficiency cut intended for all Federal government agencies. This is good news, but will the ABC get a funding increase from the Rudd Government in the next budget? The ALP went to the election only promising 'adequate' funding of the ABC, and an increase seems unlikely in the coming belt-tightening budget, despite community expectations to the contrary. However, a targeted grant to assist the ABC to continue its ground breaking initiatives in digital narrowcasting would be money well spent by a government interested in innovation and 'democratic accountability'.

Through his Australia 2020 Summit, Kevin Rudd has signalled that the Government is open to new ideas and solutions, rather than the ideological orthodoxies that have dominated the agendas of right and left for the past decade. Applying this type of thinking, progressives should move beyond the culture wars and the funding fetish, and towards bigger ideas about a culturally democratic ABC.

Original article:
<http://cpd.org.au/article/culture-war-cultural-democracy-its-your-abc>

This article was previously published by the Centre for Policy Development, a public interest think tank. For more articles on Australia's media policy see <http://cpd.org.au>

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM LABOR?

It is a truism that oppositions tend to like the ABC and governments tend to loathe it. If the ABC is doing its job properly, perhaps that is how it should be. Governments wield much more power than oppositions, and thus require greater scrutiny from the media.

On the positive side it seems that the Rudd government is serious about reforming the process by which members of the ABC board, and similar bodies, are chosen. Labor has adopted Friends of the ABC policy that board appointments should follow an open and transparent process similar to the process adopted in the UK and known as the Nolan Rules.

With the terms of two members of the ABC board due to expire shortly, some have been disappointed that Labor has not taken the opportunity to "balance" the right wing tilt of the current board with the appointment of friendly faces. But if the government is serious about a non

partisan process such a move would destroy its credibility. It is worth the wait to do things openly and properly.

Another Labor promise has been the restoration of the position of the Staff Elected Director, which was abolished by the Howard government just as the ABC staff had elected Quentin Dempster as their representative.

This position is one of two positions on the ABC board which would not be subject to the Nolan Rules process. The second is the position of Managing Director, which is determined by the board itself.

The Howard government changed the ABC Act to remove the provision for a Staff Elected Director. The Coalition will control of the Senate at least until July, and possibly beyond that (depending on independents and minor parties). It is unlikely that there can be legislation for a Staff Elected Director until July at the earliest.

However, the Whitlam government appointed a Staff Elected Director

Darce Cassidy



without amending the Act. The minister simply used his power to make appointments to appoint a person chosen by the staff. The current government could do the same, if it chose. An election has been held and the government could simply appoint Dempster as soon as the first vacancy occurs.

In opposition Labor was sympathetic to a funding increase for the ABC. It promised adequate funding, but made no specific funding promises. The Coalition promised money for a third digital TV channel, aimed at children. Despite speculation that it would match the promise, as it had matched other Coalition promises, Labor did not commit itself to a figure.

The chances of additional funds for the ABC in the May budget are slim. None the less, Friends of the ABC will pursue the issue. 

GOOD REASONS FOR OPTIMISM ABOUT THE ABC'S FUTURE

Robert Manne

As soon as the Howard government was elected, it decided to make the ABC one of the main fronts of the culture war it was determined to prosecute. The justification can be summarised like this.

At some time in the past, so it was alleged, the ABC had been captured by its staff, who sought to use the broadcaster, in a Gramscian manner, as a launching pad for cultural revolution. As part of this cultural revolution, the ABC for a long time had supposedly pushed the agenda of the Left on issues such as refugees, the republic, multiculturalism, reconciliation, radical feminism, extreme environmentalism, anti-Americanism, gay rights and so on. Because it was supposedly still influenced by Marxism, it was anti-

capitalist, showing little interest in, or understanding of, real-world economic.

The ABC had long been dominated, it was claimed, by so-called elites who tried to force their so-called politically correct views down the throats of ordinary people.

Because there was believed to be a disconnect between the ABC program-makers, who were said to be left-wing ideologues, and their viewers and listeners, who on balance were liberal or conservative, the short description of the ABC most favoured by John Howard in 1996 was the one supplied by his adviser Grahame Morris: 'Our enemy talking to our friends.'

Although almost every element of this case was exaggerated or entirely

fanciful, at the time the Howard government came into office both it and its supporters believed something needed to be done.

With the election of the Rudd Government there is some reason to feel optimistic about the future of the ABC. The culture wars will come abruptly to an end. Without a friendly government receptive to its bilious views, the right-wing commentariat will lose most of its cultural clout.

The absurdity of having people such as Ron Brunton, Janet Albrechtsen and Keith Windschuttle on the ABC board will also be instantly transparent. In time they will be replaced. If they had any honour, they would resign. As their presence has completely delegitimised the system of governmental control over appointments to the board, a collective sigh of relief will be heard from all but the most blinkered cultural warrior when, as Kevin Rudd has promised, a new, more BBC-like system of non-partisan appointments is introduced. 

COME CLEAN ON COMMERCIALISATION OF THE ABC

Quentin Dempster

The Newman board has restructured the ABC divisions, replacing ABC Enterprises (which managed ABC Shops and other related products) with what it is calling ABC Commercial. With the ABC Act expressly prohibiting advertising on ABC radio and television, ABC Commercial wants to construct a new business plan around cybercast advertising on ABC Online.

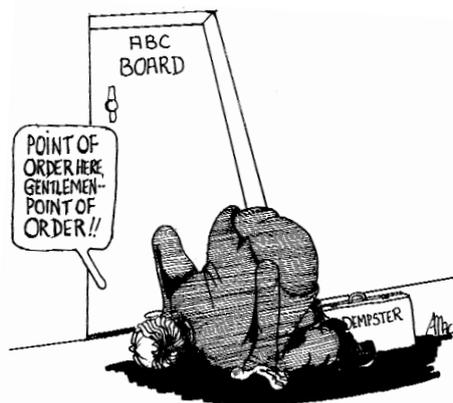
Broadcasting is rapidly morphing into cybercasting. If you miss tonight's edition of The 7.30 Report, ABC TV News, or any other ABC copyright program, soon you will be able to go to your computer and play the full digital video at any time. People are already watching the popular The Chaser's War on Everything and Four Corners' broadband editions through their internet.

There is nothing in the ABC Act to prevent the Newman board from inserting advertising in and around this content. The spirit of the ABC Act, drafted in 1983 before the internet was invented, is clearly against advertising. But the board has helpful legal advice that because the act is silent on internet advertising, there is nothing in the act to prevent cybercast advertising. (Lawyers. Don't you just love 'em?).

The Howard government, through Communication Minister Coonan, [said it was] a matter for the ABC board. But the government had no mandate from the Australian people to distort the existing funding base of the ABC and, through the commercial imperative this will create, its very purpose.

Public broadcasters view their audiences as citizens in a democracy to be informed, engaged and challenged through innovative, high-quality and comprehensive programming, not as consumers to be delivered up to advertisers.

Both the ABC and SBS boards will say enhanced commercial returns will mean more Australian programming. This is superficially attractive. But what sort of programming? Mark Scott, the ABC's new managing director, is a former editorial director of John



Fairfax Holdings Ltd. We are told his Fairfax experience demonstrates that it is possible to separate church and state – editorial from commercial. This was rubbish at Fairfax and will be rubbish at the ABC.

Cybercast advertising at the ABC will be self-defeating. When push comes to shove in the pre-Budget Cabinet expenditure review committee, treasury advisers will monitor the ABC's commercial revenue and downwardly adjust the taxpayer appropriation accordingly.

The ABC board should have a transition strategy [following the] change of government. It should be telling the public just what the ABC can do for Australia through the digital free-to-air multi-channel and broadband revolution. The ABC could have an ABC Education division with a free-to-air English and other languages channel, a technical and further education channel, a dedicated Australian-made children's channel and other nation-building services which exploit this extraordinary and exciting technology. But the new chairman has not said 'boo' on any important topic of strategic importance to the ABC since his appointment last year.

The current ABC board cannot be relied on to advocate the cause of independent public broadcasting. It is in an ideological and party-political bog. If it is out to destroy the so-called ABC culture, introducing advertising on the ABC should do the trick. The current threat is insidious.

Our minds must be clear. Labor policy ... is to prohibit cybercast advertising, stop the party-political

stack of the ABC board and restore the staff-elected director position in the ABC Act. This is most welcome in an institution which has been under sustained ideological attack and vilification for more than a decade. But it is also hard to forget that under the Hawke/Keating governments 1983-1996 the ABC was substantially defunded. Pressure must be maintained on the Rudd government to rebuild the ABC's creative capacity and to protect the multicultural purpose of SBS.

Where does public broadcasting stand with the change of government in Canberra? Please let us know, Mr Rudd. In the meantime, those who want the ABC to survive as an adequately funded, independent, mainstream and non-commercial public broadcaster will have to fight hard. We must never get tired. 

Do you wish to contribute to Update?

If so, please observe the following Guidelines:

- All material should be submitted to the editor Mal Hewitt email: malandal@optusnet.com.au
- Articles submitted can only be accepted in Microsoft Word format, sent in as attachments to an email. If you don't normally use Microsoft Word, you will find you can 'Save As' into that format.
- Please do not attempt to "format" or indent or otherwise shape the word document, and in particular do not type a "return" after any sentence, except at the end of a paragraph.
- Do not use double spacing. The text should just flow normally.
- Pictures should be submitted in .JPG format as attachments to an email.
- If possible crop your photos before submission.
- To maintain the quality of images inserted into Update, pictures should not be reduced in "file size" (the number of kilobytes). Just submit them in their original file size, after cropping.
- Ideally, pics should be greater than 300 kilobytes, and depending on your camera setup they may be several megabytes.
- Picture captions are essential - add them to the MS Word document submitted. Refer the caption to the picture file name.

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